

Sage-Grouse Initiative

Working Lands Partnership for Rangeland Health and Sage- Grouse Habitat Conservation

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Montana's SGI

- What's good for cows is good for sage-grouse.

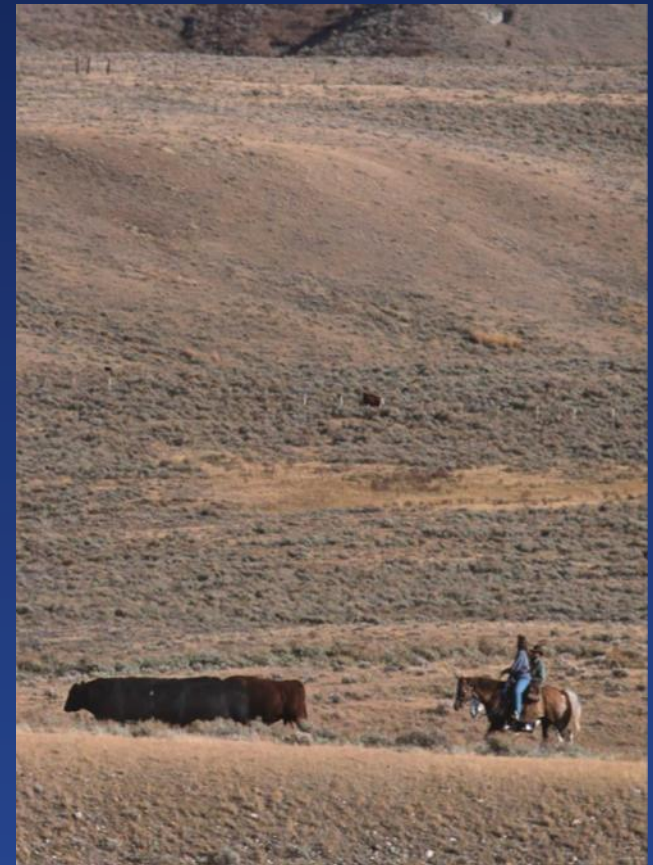


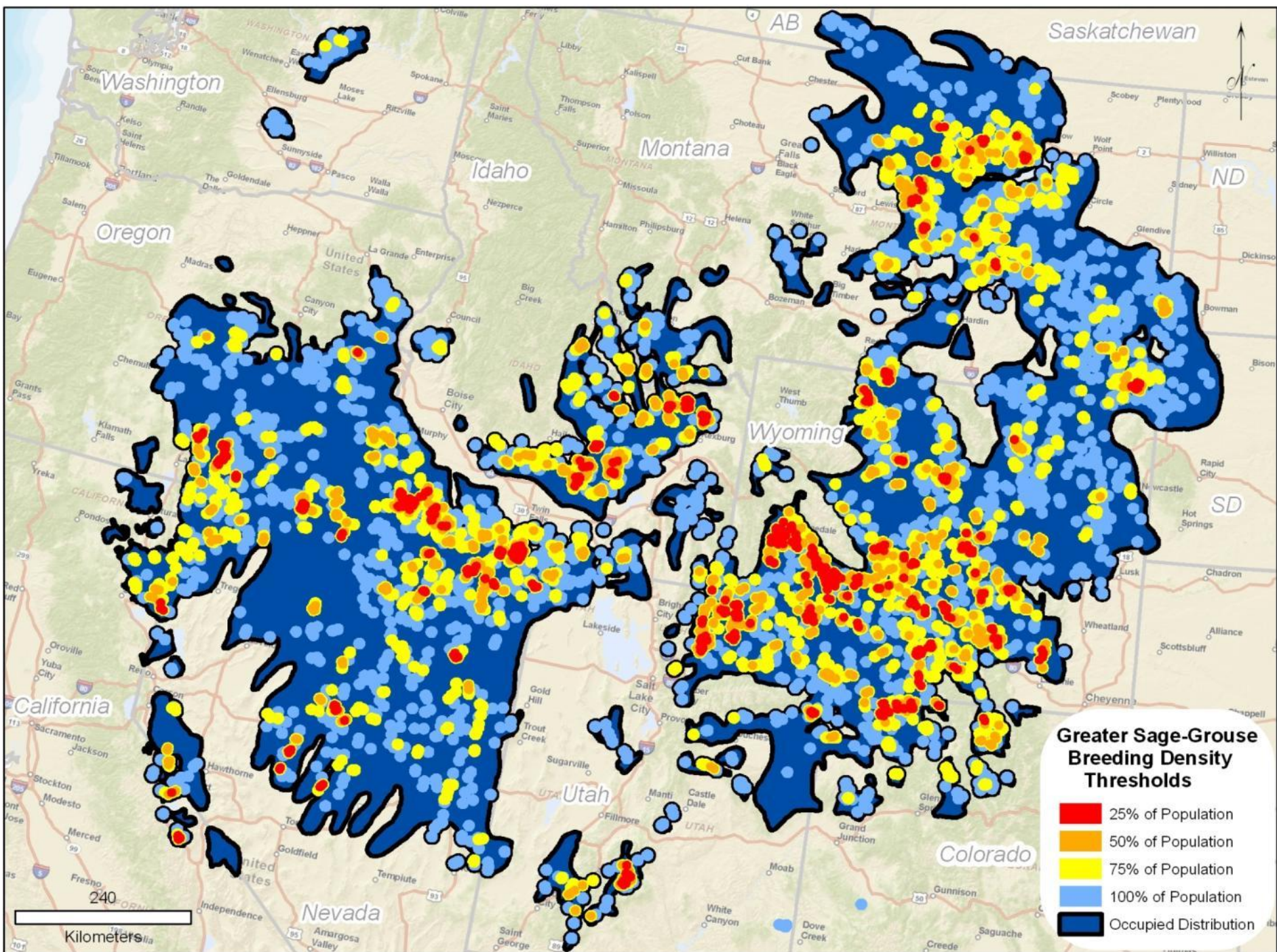
SGL – What is it?

- Initiative in 11 states to recover sage-grouse populations
- Prevent ESA listing

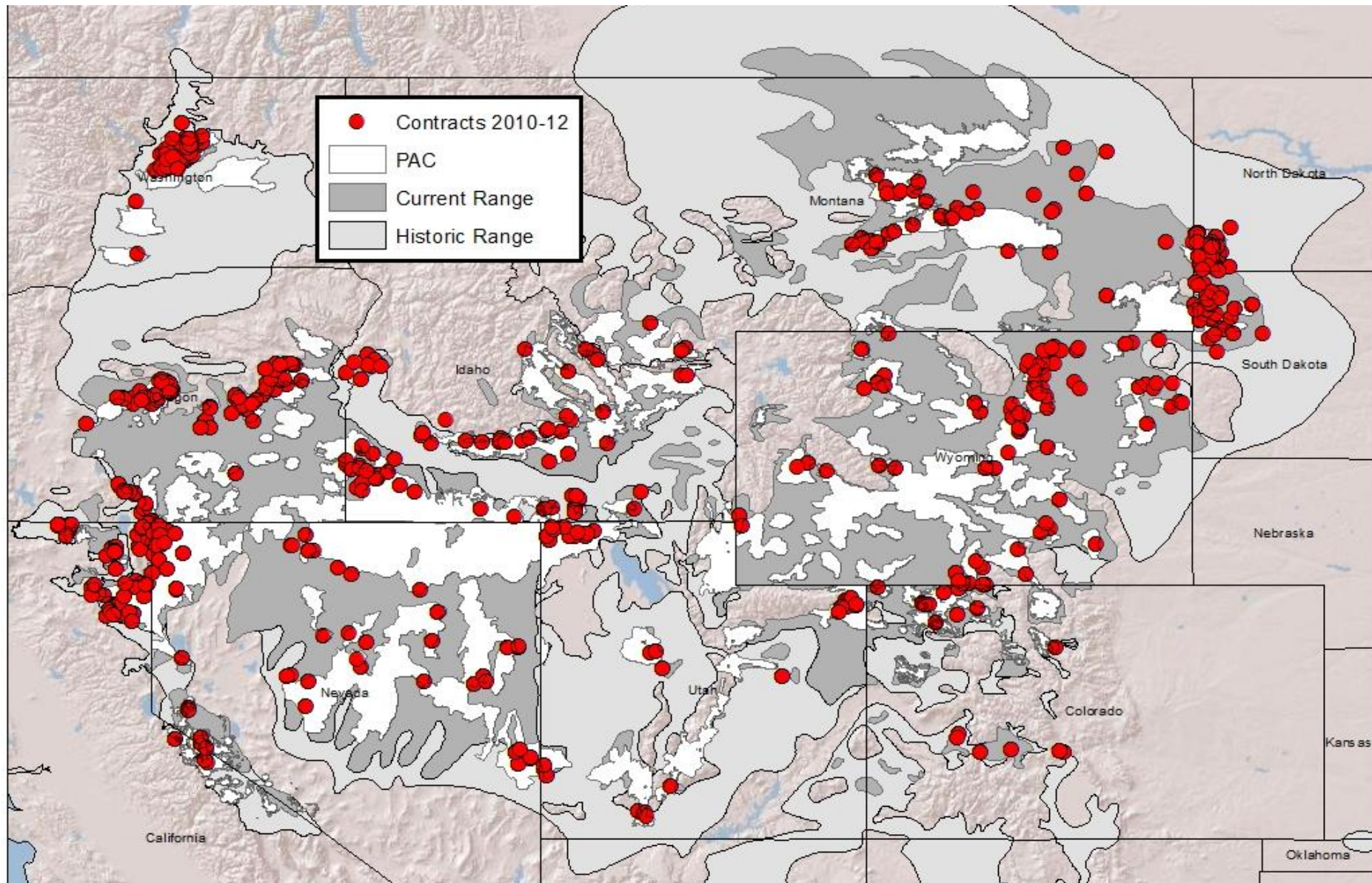
Issues:

- Grazing Management
- Conifer Encroachment
- Fence Collisions
- Drowning in Stock Tanks
- Predation





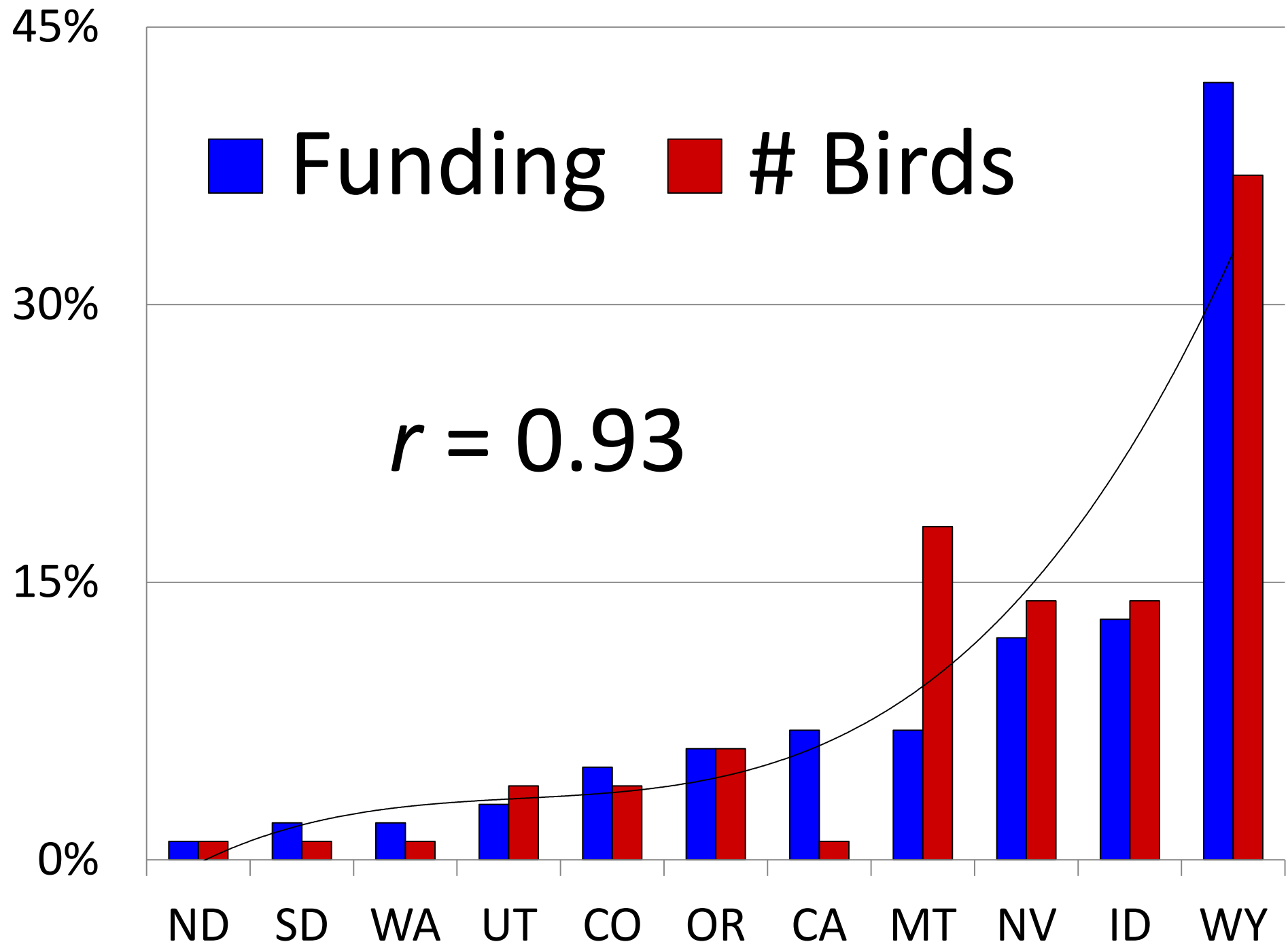
All SGI WHIP and EQIP Contracts 2010-2012

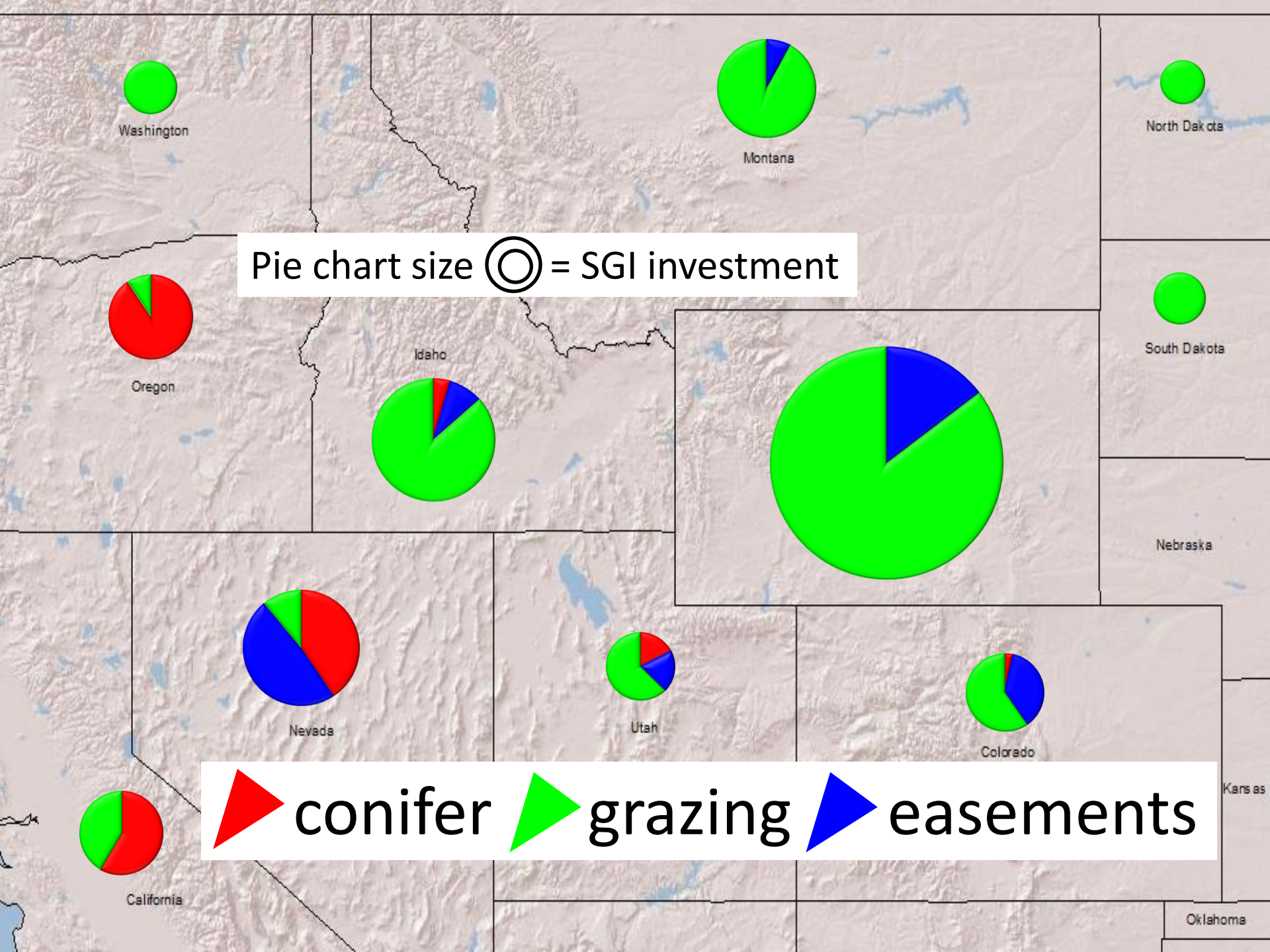


62% of contracts in PACS

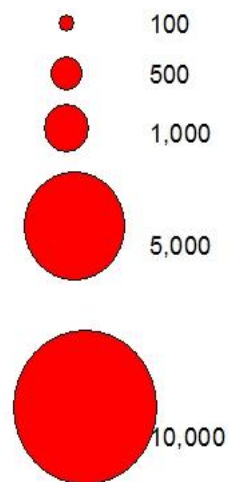
83% in current range

95% within historic

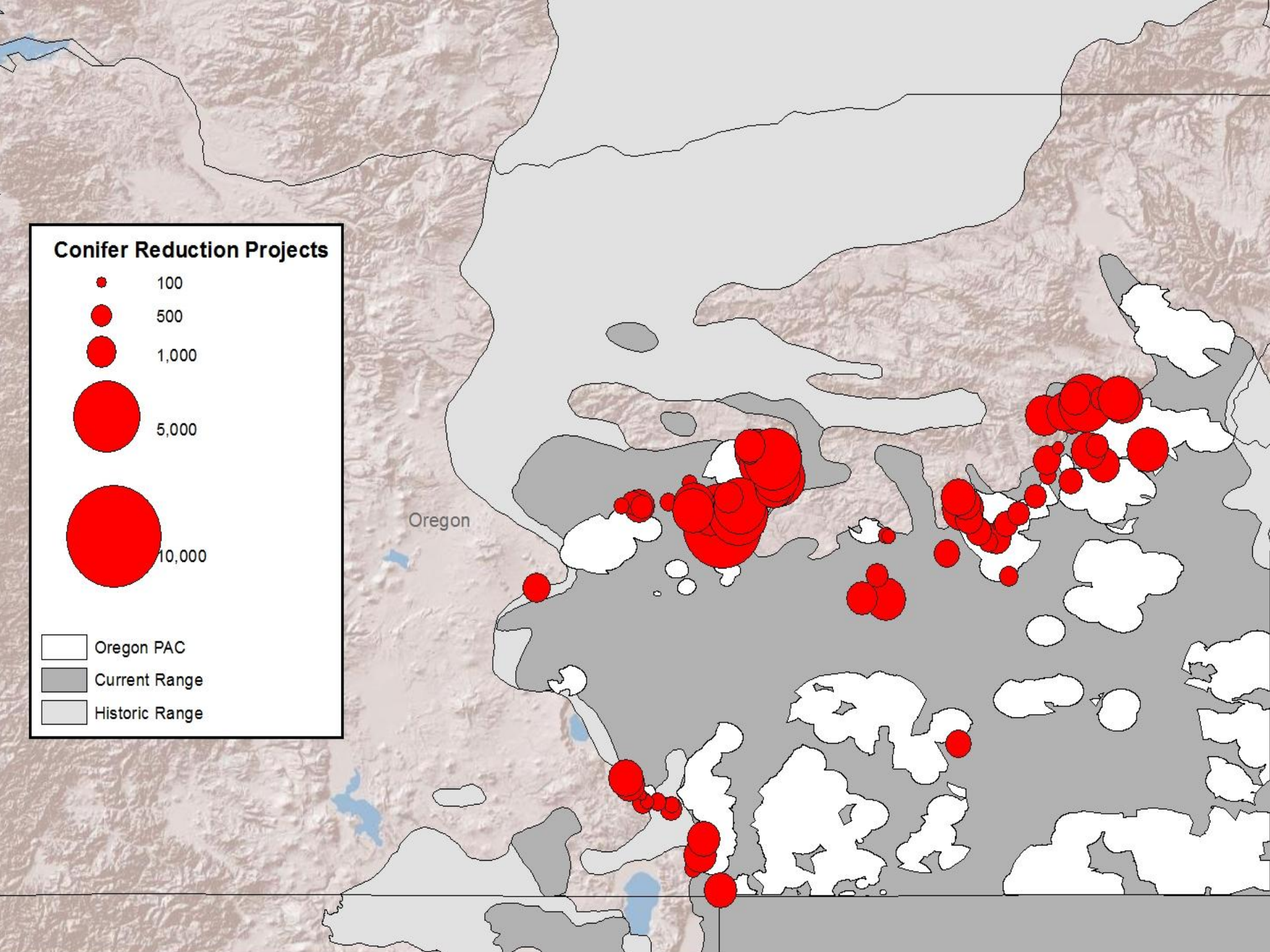




Conifer Reduction Projects



Oregon



Grazing systems on
2.1 million acres



Marked or moved 495 miles of
'high risk' fence



Helped secure conservation
easements on 242,000 acres



Removed encroached conifers on
195,000 acres



Why SGI?

- Sustainable ranching = good sage-grouse habitat
- Sustainable ranching = open space



- Sustainable ranching = healthy local economies
- Changing the environmental paradigm
- Prevent ESA sage-grouse listing

Why is ranching good for sage-grouse?

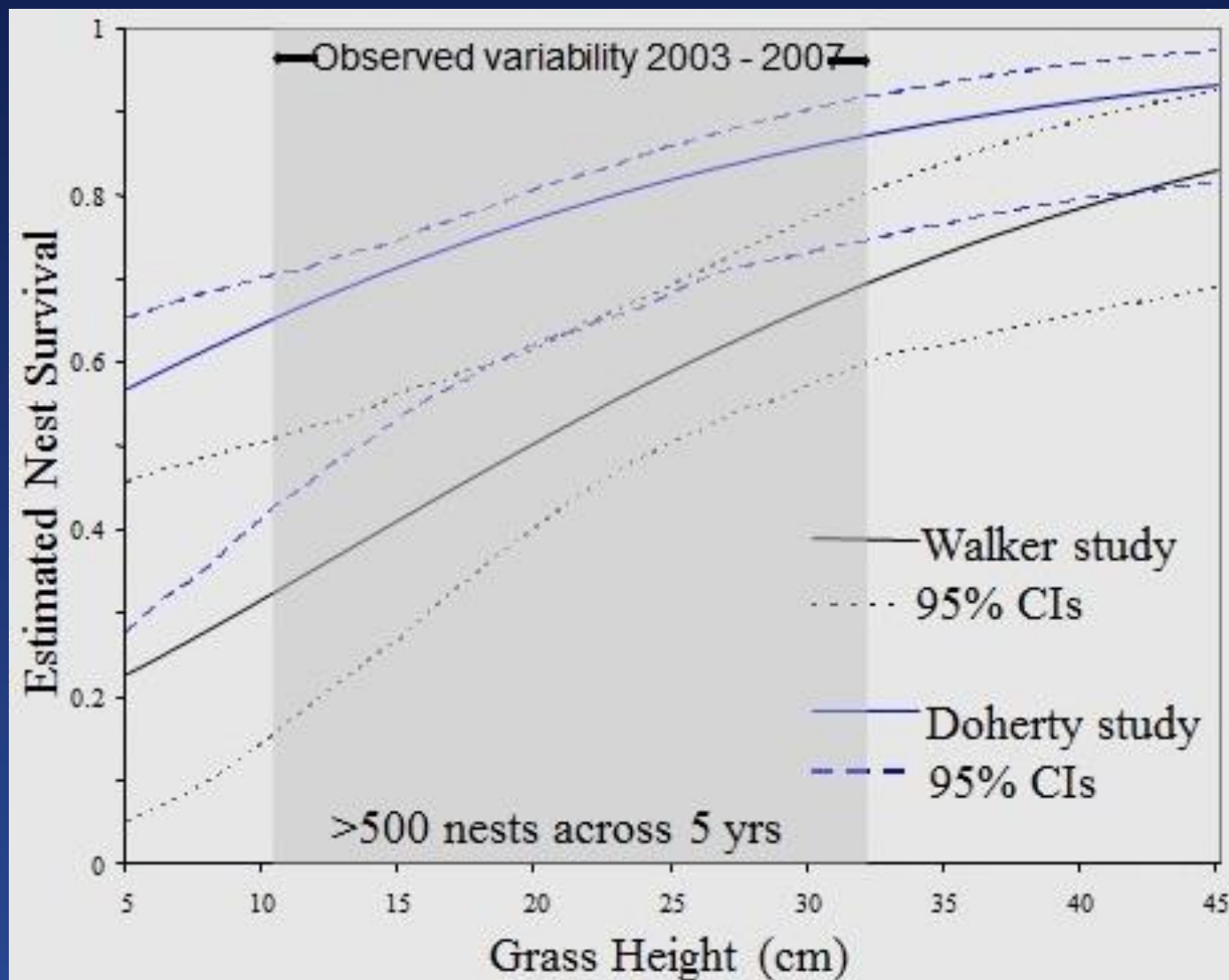


Sage Grouse is a Landscape Species





Sage Grouse nest



Old Grass and Litter Cover



- Adds bulk to balance 'washy' spring feed
- Protects soil surface = less erosion
- Puts more moisture into the ground
- Inhibits grasshopper reproduction
- Critical drought reserve for livestock
- Increased nest success for sage-grouse

What do Sage Grouse need?

- Sagebrush
(in large blocks)
- Residual Cover
(old grass carry-over)
- Forbs/Insects
(diversity)



Residual Cover



Sagebrush – How much is enough?



Sage Grouse Habitat Assessment – Breeding Habitat

Habitat Indicator	Suitable Habitat	Marginal Habitat	Unsuitable Habitat
Average Big Sagebrush Canopy Cover	15 -25%	10-14 or 26-35%	<10 or >35%
Average Big Sagebrush Height	12 - 30 inches	10 - 14 or 31 - 40 inches	<10 or > 40 inches
Big Sagebrush Growth Form	Spreading; none to few dead branches	Mix of spreading and columnar growth forms	Tall, columnar form; many dead branches
Average Herbaceous Grass and Forb Height	≥ 7 inches	5 – 7 inches	< 5 inches
Average Grass Canopy Cover	≥ 15%	5-14%	<5%
Average Forb Canopy Cover	≥ 10%	5 – 9%	< 5%
Forb Richness	High	Low	Very Low

Forbs and Insects

- Diversity of native range plants allows individual animals to select their optimum diet.
- Succulent forbs critical for summer grouse diets: sustainable grazing increases forb diversity.
- Forbs support insect populations critical to sage grouse chicks.
- Grazing systems and riding prevent overuse of moist site forb production.

Grazing and Sage-Grouse Go Together



Livestock need:



- Diverse rangeland vegetation (grass-forb-shrub)
- Old grass carry-over

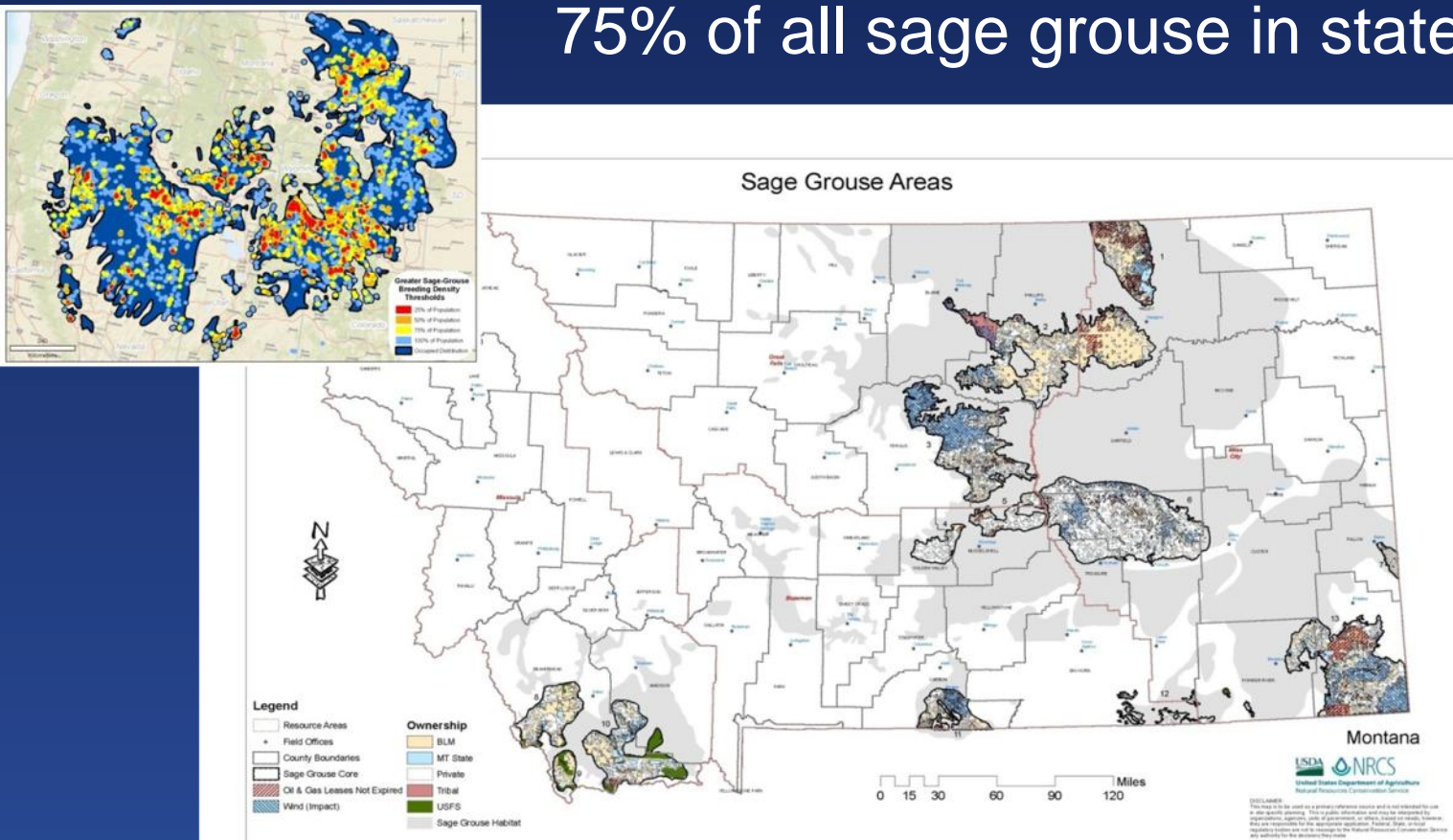
So do Sage-Grouse

Montana SGI – What Have We Accomplished?

- Core Areas
- Outreach and education
- Conservation easements
- Management
- Personnel on the ground
- Monitoring



Reduced 27 million acres of occupied habitat to 8.9 million acres containing 75% of all sage grouse in state.



Outreach and Education

- Montana NRCS Homepage
www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov
- Click on Sage-grouse Initiative



Outreach Accomplishments

Examples:

- “Save the Sage” video
- “Sharing the SGI Story” video
- A Landowner’s Guide to Wildlife-Friendly Fences
- GovDelivery website updates

Conservation Easements

6 easements on
47,151 acres:

- 3 Saskatchewan-Missouri Breaks migration corridor (FRPP)
- 3 Core 4 (GRP)



SGI Easements in Progress

- Core Area 10 – Centennial Valley
- NRCS/The Nature Conservancy
- About 4,100 acres
- Farm and Ranchland Protection Program

Management for Range Health and Sage-grouse

- 2 Grazing Options:
 - Meet NRCS prescribed grazing (528) spec
 - Meet 528 + rest 20% of sage-grouse nest habitat
- Address Other Threats:
 - Fence marking
 - Escape ramps in stock tanks
 - Remove junk piles, etc.



Prescribed Grazing Progress

- EQIP 2010 through 2012
- 63 contracts
- 522,032 acres = 816 sq. miles
- \$12.2 million
- Core Areas: 3,4,5,6,10,11, 13 +1
Meagher County.

MT SGI Fence Marking Progress

Through FY 2012:

- 89 miles installed
- 49 miles contracted to be installed
- 10 miles marked by Petroleum County CD for non-participants

Prescribed Grazing Specification

- Stocking Rate: Must balance forage demand with supply; key to any grazing strategy
- Scheduled Growing Season Rest: Alter season of use
- Plan for drought reserve (= residual cover)
- Graze for $< \frac{1}{2}$ of growing season of key species (April-June for cool season species; May-July for warm season species)

Prescribed Grazing Specification

- Utilization: 50 %
by weight of key
species
- Determine range
health and trend
- Set up long-term
monitoring



“Boots on the Ground”

Extra Field Staff for SGI:

- “SWAT” employees:
Malta, Glasgow,
Forsyth
- Partner range
conservationist: Dillon
- NRCS staff with SGI
priority: Roundup,
Winnett, Forsyth



Monitoring Results

- Annual follow-up with each SGI ranch
- 5-year study by UM and FWP:
 - radio marked birds
 - are nesting grouse using our rest option habitat more than non-contracted habitat?
 - Is hen/chick survival greater on participating ranches?



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